

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

---

## Representations of Karelians and the Karelian language in Karelian and Russian local newspapers

Tanczos, Outi Maria

2015

---

Tanczos , O M 2015 , ' Representations of Karelians and the Karelian language in Karelian and Russian local newspapers ' , Journal of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics , vol. 6 , no. 1 , pp. 91-110 . < <http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2015.6.1.06> >

---

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/228045>

---

publishedVersion

---

*Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.*

*This is an electronic reprint of the original article.*

*This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.*

*Please cite the original version.*

## REPRESENTATIONS OF KARELIANS AND THE KARELIAN LANGUAGE IN KARELIAN AND RUSSIAN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

**Outi Tånczos**

*University of Helsinki*

**Abstract.** The paper presents the results of a critical discourse analysis study conducted on two Karelian and two Russian local newspapers that are regularly published in the Republic of Karelia. Minority language media is often considered an important tool in minority language preservation. This paper focuses on representations of the Karelian language and culture in both minority and mainstream newspapers and the effects that these representations may have on the preservation and revitalisation efforts of Karelian.

**Keywords:** Karelian, minority languages, critical discourse analysis, Karelian newspapers, minority media, language revitalisation

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/jeful.2015.6.1.06>

### 1. Introduction

When investigating the status of a linguistic minority, the existence of media in the minority language is often interpreted as a token of its vitality. The media provides a public sphere in which a minority may maintain and develop language and culture and supervise its interests. The attitudes and values expressed by the majority media also carry considerable weight for the minority community. The aim of this article is to compare the representations of the Karelian language and Karelians in local Russian and Karelian newspapers in the Republic of Karelia and to reflect on the effect that these representations may have on the revitalisation efforts of the Karelian language.

The article is based on the methodology of critical discourse analysis and a detailed study of the current situation carried out within the framework of the interdisciplinary ELDIA (European Language Diversity for All) project. The objective of ELDIA was to contribute to a better understanding of how local, ‘national’, and ‘international’ languages interact in contemporary Europe. The project combined several approaches

to these issues in the light of twelve case studies. One of these was a study of media texts by means of critical discourse analysis of majority and minority languages, which was aimed at producing information on how minority languages and language communities are represented in majority and minority media. The media play an important role in transmitting and legitimising power relations and in producing and reproducing ethnic identities. The media can also become a significant tool in language maintenance (Riggins 1992: 2). Crystal (2000: 130) even regards access to the media as a prerequisite for language survival for a minority.

The goal of the current study is to outline the discourse on the language community in question. It was originally conducted as an independent study that would later also constitute part of a larger ELDIA study on the status quo of the community<sup>1</sup>. The study was carried out simultaneously in six countries using common guidelines for media texts published in 13 languages. Key questions in the research are whether maintenance of language and culture was a topic in the media and how it was discussed, and what kinds of roles and functions were assigned to the minority and majority with regard to language and culture maintenance and revitalisation. The starting point was the idea that in order to protect minorities, the majority needs to identify and recognise their special needs.

The article aims to address the question of whether media texts on Karelians and the Karelian language support the recognition of these special needs and to present some results of the analysis on Karelian and Russian media texts from the Republic of Karelia.

## 2. Current status of the Karelian language

Karelian is mainly spoken inside the Republic of Karelia, but also to a lesser extent in the Tver' area and in Finland. Linguistically, Karelian can be divided into several varieties (Sarhimaa 1999: 20). This study deals with the two main varieties, Olonets Karelian and Karelian Proper.

In the 2010 Russian census, the number of speakers of any form of Karelian was 25,600, while the number of ethnic Karelians was 60,815 (Perepis' 2010). The number of Karelians in Russian censuses has been declining since the census of 1939. It has fallen dramatically over the

---

1 ELDIA publications are available at <http://www.eldia-project.org/>.

last 20 years, much more rapidly than demographic changes in the whole population (Karjalainen et al. 2013: 33–34). This is explained by accelerating assimilation (Lallukka 2012: 181–185), which also includes a language shift from Karelian-Russian bilingualism towards Russian monolingualism (Klementyev et al. 2012: 1, Sarhimaa 1999: 50). Mixed marriages and a lack of knowledge of multilingualism have led to Russian monolingual families (Birin 1991: 150–153, Klementyev et al. 2012: 1).

One of the reasons for this language shift is the low prestige of the Karelian language. Karelian does not have a long history as a language of literacy. In the 1930s it was standardised and made a second official language in the Republic of Karelia (in addition to Russian). This state of affairs only lasted until 1940, however. After WWII Russian was actively promoted, and it was not until perestroika that Karelian was used again in written form (Sarhimaa 1996: 75–78, Pasanen 2006: 117). Karelian has also been overshadowed by the more prestigious Finnish language.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the legislative framework has not provided sufficient support for the Karelian language and the number of Karelian speakers has continually decreased. Despite its role as the titular language of the Republic of Karelia, it has not acquired the status of a state language, and so far there is no real language law in the Republic of Karelia. The closest equivalent is the Law on the State Support of the Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish languages in the Republic of Karelia, which was adopted in March 2004. It has a narrower scope than the language laws of other republics, but it creates possibilities for the use of Karelian in the public sphere. The republican Law on Education (18 January 1994) and the Law on Culture (24 January 1995) regulate the use of Karelian by creating the conditions for Karelians to ensure their right to receive a general education in Karelian. However, one should note that the implementation of these laws is inadequate and often depends on the motivation of local officials, leaving multilingualism merely on a symbolic level. The presence of Karelians in political representation and decision-making is low, while the status of their only body of ethnic representation, the Congress of the Karelian People, is only that of an NGO. In brief, the actual use of Karelian in society is extremely limited. Furthermore, Russian public discourse tends to stress shared civil values instead of ethnic and linguistic plurality. (Karjalainen et al. 2013: 108, Klementyev et al. 2012: 4–6)

### 3. The media and minorities

Representations of ethnic minorities in the majority media have been the topic of several studies over the past decades (see e.g. Alia and Bull 2005, Pietikäinen 2000). These studies show that minorities tend to be underrepresented and stereotypically characterised, even presented in a negative light. Their depiction often focuses on problems, while the structural inequalities they suffer from are largely ignored (Riggins 1992: 2, Cottle 2000: 8). Therefore, one of the main functions of minority media is to serve as the public sphere, enabling a minority's involvement in political life and giving it a voice of its own. The media can also create a sense of belonging for a group, thus producing identities. (Cormack 2007: 54–55)

It is argued that mass media is never intended for language maintenance (Cormack 2007: 62), or that it plays only a minor role in language preservation and that minority media cannot compete with majority media (Fishman 2001: 473, 482). In terms of such comparisons, however, one should consider several functions of minority media that make it different from majority media. The minority media does not necessarily need to compete against majority media, as it may have a purpose of its own. Minority language media can be regarded as a preventative tool against minority tradition being reduced to the level of mere folklore. Being able to report on modern-day phenomena requires constant language development and planning. It also has significant symbolic value in signalling the competence of the language community in the modern world. (Riggins 1992: 3, Cormack 2004: 2)

In eroding speech communities that lack modern education and are affected by continuing population decline, media has a special importance in connecting speakers and readers. According to a survey carried out among consumers of Karelian minority media, the most important roles assigned to the media by the public were to maintain and revive language and national culture and to provide information on nationality issues. Communication of other news was considered less important (Skön and Torkkola 1997: 95–96). This is in line with the fact that practically all Karelian speakers are bilingual and thus able to turn to the more wide-ranging Russian media to follow news.

#### 4. Critical discourse analysis as an approach to social issues

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the dialogic relationship of texts and society that goes beyond the linguistic features of text and links them with their larger context, asking why a text was written as it was and what effect it may possibly have (Fairclough 1995: 33–34). The starting point is the idea that texts not only reflect social relations, but that linguistic conventions also maintain and consolidate social relations and systems. Texts (re)construct and intermit power relations and ideological processes, but they are also a product of their context. The term ‘critical’ refers to the goal of exposing processes behind the texts that generate and maintain social inequality (van Dijk 1993: 249–250). For analysis, several techniques can be applied, depending on the specific research question and data.

Critical discourse analysis is derived from Critical Theory. In this paradigm, the role of the researcher is seen as subjectivist and transactional, with his or her values and position inevitably influencing findings. The author of this article is not a member of the investigated community, which may have been a hindrance to discovering some nuances and important points in the data. On the other hand, not being a member may have made the comparison of texts from two language communities more balanced.

#### 5. Data

The analysis focused on print media, as Karelian audio-visual media is scarce and does not have the level of continuity of Karelian newspapers. In the Republic of Karelia there are three newspapers published entirely in Karelian, as well as two magazines and some municipal newspapers containing some material in that language (Klementyev et al. 2012: 10). My Karelian data is from the weekly newspapers *Oma Maa* (‘Own Land’), published in Olonets Karelian, and *Vienan Karjala* (‘Belomorsk Karelia’), published in Karelian Proper. These papers were chosen because of their relatively wide circulation, as well as the regularity and duration of their publication.

Aside from a short-lived experiment with a Karelian-language newspaper at the end of the 1930s (Sarhimaa 1996: 77), there was no printed media in Karelian until *Oma Maa* was founded in 1990 by the authorities of the republic following the initiative of Karelians. The reasons

behind establishing state-funded minority-language media in Russia in the early 1990s seem to fit Riggins' integrationist model of state support. In this model, the authorities support minority media in order to promote integration, but also to monitor the minority (Riggins 1992: 8–11). However, state support for minorities has been interpreted as a token of the freer atmosphere of glasnost (Sarhimaa 1996: 78) and the role of *Oma Mua* as that of a genuine organ of Karelian culture (Pietiläinen 2002: 189). Apart from this, it is unlikely that prior to this there was any non-governmental funding available for that purpose.

When it began, *Oma Mua* published content in two Karelian variants. In 2000, however, these were split into two separate papers: *Oma Mua* in Olonets Karelian and *Vienan Karjala* in Belomorsk Karelian (Filippova 2005: 93). The editorial offices of *Oma Mua* and *Vienan Karjala* are located in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia. *Oma Mua* has eight pages (before 2011 it only had four) and *Vienan Karjala* has four pages (Karjalainen et al. 2013: 51). Both papers have a small circulation, only 700 copies. In 2014 the papers are to be merged again (Oma Mua 2013).

Both *Oma Mua* and *Vienan Karjala* focus on Karelian language and culture and nationality issues, and also contain the most important news of the Republic of Karelia and other parts of Russia. Furthermore, fiction in Karelian is published, at least to some extent. In general it can be said that the readership consists mainly of elderly people, language activists and students learning Karelian. Often the papers are utilised in language teaching as well.

A special feature of the older issues of *Oma Mua* and *Vienan Karjala* is that they received a lot of their material from freelance authors and ordinary readers. Often it is not possible to distinguish readers' opinions from editorial content.

Unlike the Karelian media, the Russian majority media is very diverse. Television and radio are the most important sources of information for national (all-Russian) issues, but for local issues newspapers play a central role (Pietiläinen 2005: 99–100). Since the focus of this study is on local minorities, I have chosen for analysis two regional weeklies, *Karel'skaja Gubernija* and *Kur'er Karelii* (earlier *Severnyj Kur'er*, an offshoot of the Soviet *Leninskaja pravda*). Both newspapers are published in Russian and primarily address topics of local interest. The reasons for selecting these papers include their established publication history and divergent political positions: *Kur'er Karelii* has been

characterised as being closer to the party line and *Karel'skaja Gubernija* to the opposition (Tsygankov 2004: 4–5).

*Kur'er Karelii* was published weekly with a circulation of 10,000 copies and distributed throughout the whole republic (Kur'er Karelii 2011). Until 2010, it was published five days a week, but from that time only once a week until it was closed down in September 2011. Its editorial office was based in Petrozavodsk. *Karel'skaja Gubernija* has been published since 1996 and has a circulation of 30,000 copies (Integrum 2013).

The readerships of the Russian and Karelian papers are not two separate groups. Due to widespread bilingualism and the Russian education system, Karelians are accustomed to consuming Russian media and are also a part of the Russian language community. (Karjalainen et al. 2013: 153, 204)

## 6. Description of the analysis process

The analysis centred on four themes: 1) legislation, 2) education, 3) media and 4) language use and interaction. These themes were used in common by all ELDIA researchers working simultaneously on studies of several European minority and majority media. The task of analysis was loosely theory-based, but left researchers with the possibility of reacting flexibly to the special features of their data and its context. In practice, this meant that each researcher could, for instance, pick the most relevant textual and linguistic features for analysis. In the case of Karelian, these primarily included the choice of topics, lexical choices and the use of person.

Three time periods of three months were chosen for research. Rough content analysis was performed on the four newspapers, searching for texts dealing with the chosen themes. Two periods in common for all researchers were February–April 1998 and November 2010–January 2011. The third period was left for each researcher to decide. This period was February–April 2004 in the case of the Republic of Karelia, when a language law proposal was discussed there. *Vienan Karjala* was not available from the end of the last analysis period (1/2011). In the case of *Vienan Karjala*, therefore, issues from 10/2010–12/2010 were examined instead.



A total of 87 articles were selected from *Oma Mua* and 44 from *Vienan Karjala*. The difference in number mainly reflects the fact that *Vienan Karjala* has been a separate newspaper only since 2000.

The Russian newspapers were accessed through the Integrum<sup>2</sup> database. I conducted a search filtered by the analysis periods with the search terms *karel'skij* ('Karelian') + *jazyk* ('language') and perused the hits to find the texts that dealt with the chosen themes. From *Kur'er Karelii*, this method produced 31 articles and from *Karel'skaja Gubernija* only nine articles. The discrepancy in the extent of data from the different newspapers is obvious, but I consider it a result in itself, an illustration of how little attention the majority media pays to minority issues.

## 7. Choice of topics

In the two Russian newspapers, the Karelians are often just mentioned briefly. The news most commonly concerns the activities of the traditional Karelian cultural and national organisations. Their repeated presence in the texts suggests that for the majority papers, they are perceived as the representatives of the Karelians. Another manifestation of Karelian culture in the analysed papers is the Kalevala national epic, but its pronounced presence can be explained by the publication of a new Russian translation made during the analysis period. Overall, the local Russian newspapers do not deal much with minorities.

In the Karelian newspapers, the Karelian language and culture are an extremely central topic, if not the core content of the newspaper.

- (1) *Oma Pajo on niilöi harvoi karjalazii pajojoukkoloi, ket enne kaikkie vardoijah karjalan kielen puhtahuttu.* (OM1)  
'Oma Pajo is one of the few Karelian vocal ensembles that first and foremost take care of the purity of the language.'

As shown in (1), the texts are often based on strong ties with traditional, 'pure' culture, 'pure' language and the traditional way of life in villages. They make very few attempts to treat modern or city life, although this has been the environment of many Karelians for several decades. They acknowledge the endangered state of the Karelian

---

2 See [www.integrumworld.com](http://www.integrumworld.com).

language, but do not share information on language rights or linguistic issues (such as multilingualism, second language acquisition, etc.).

In the early 1990s, Finno-Ugrian intellectual discourse centred around ethnocultural survival (Lallukka 2001: 10). The 1998 issues of *Oma Mua* echo this discourse and report widely on the activities of Karelian national and cultural organisations and the approaching elections in the republic. Language is a recurring topic in these discussions. The proposed language act is generally discussed in submissions from readers, although they were (interestingly) usually not framed as letters to the editor. This can be regarded as a significant editorial choice. By 2004, the number of articles on cultural issues had increased. Assemblies of Karelian organisations are also reported. In 2004 and 2010, there is slightly more information on minority languages in other countries, as well as interviews with politicians and scholars on societal multilingualism. In the 1998 and 2004 data, the proportion of articles containing language or national political opinions was roughly the same (10 out of 27 articles in 1998 and 9 out of 25 in 2004). The period of 2010–11 shows a decline (9/35).

The content of *Vienan Karjala* is similar to *Oma Mua*, but it contains perhaps a bit more local news concerning non-Karelian issues. In 2010, the focus was very strongly on cultural issues, organisations and activities. The proportion of articles containing comments on national or language politics is smaller than in *Oma Mua* (4/23 articles in the 2004 period and 3/21 in the 2010 period).

## 8. Representations of Karelians in the texts

Although the choice of topics in the Russian and Karelian papers is somewhat similar, there are certain differences in how Karelians and the Karelian language are represented. In the Russian papers, Karelians are represented for the most part in terms of institutions, whereas in *Oma Mua* and *Vienan Karjala* the focus is more on individuals. The Russian papers report on organisational activities and changes in legislation, but the Karelian papers express the opinions and needs of individual Karelians as unofficial representatives of the community.

An interesting trait in the Russian papers is their way of using Karelian tradition as a component of regionalism. The Karelian tradition is depicted as something stable and archaic, lending uniqueness to the

republic and also representing the common intellectual heritage of all its residents.

- (2) *Zanĵatie kruŝka proxodilo v karel'skoj gornice, kotoraja oformlena v sel'skom Dome kul'tury. Kruŝkovcy imejut plan zanĵatij do konca uĉebnogo goda. A vsja programma rassĉitana na tri goda. Za èto vremja deti uznajut mnogoe ob istorii rodnogo poselka, rajona i respublik.* (SK1)

'The activities took place in the Karelian room furnished in the village house of culture. The club members have the plan of activities up to the end of the academic year, and the whole program is designed for three years. During this time, the children learn much about the history of their native village, area and republic.'

In *Oma Mua* and *Vienan Karjala*, the Karelian tradition is represented as a part of ethno-linguistic identity. Although the focus is on the preservation of the tradition, it still hints at the changes taking place.

For a group's self-identification and political motivation, it is essential for it to be able to regard itself as different from some other group, because identity can only be constructed in relation to the Other (Hall 1997: 234, 238). One topic of inspection in this study was how the relationship of the majority and the minority is represented in text and how the media can be seen as constructing boundaries between Us and Them (Cottle 2000: 2).

In both of the Karelian papers, there is very little reporting on international collaboration in a broader framework or present-day interaction with other nationalities than Finno-Ugric peoples. One finds news from the republic and the rest of Russia, but nationalities do not play a role in these. Russians as a nationality are seldom mentioned. Even in articles dealing with such ethnically motivated conflicts as the repression of Karelians, Finns and so forth in the 1930s, the nationality of the oppressors is not mentioned, probably because of the various ethnic backgrounds of the oppressors united by a common ideology. In general, responsibility for crimes remains vague or is assigned to the government at that time. Common people, regardless of their nationality, are not blamed and it is even stated that they were not aware of what was happening. However, the victims of repressions are presented in a very positive light as loyal and industrious ordinary people, thereby stressing the injustice done to them.

Throughout history, Karelians and Finns have been closely connected culturally and linguistically, and Finns have constituted a small but visible part of the population of the republic. The presence of Finland and Finns is strong in both of the Karelian papers. They (especially Karelian activists on the Finnish side) are often presented as good neighbours and supporters of Karelian culture and language. In fact, there are more instances of news dealing with Karelian–Finnish cooperation than Karelian–Russian activities.

One of the central means of constructing Karelians as a group in the Karelian texts is the use of ‘we’ forms. This is a commonly used technique in discourses on national identities (Wodak et al. 2009: 119, 141) and an example of media constructing boundaries between Us and Them (Cottle 2000: 2). The data contains occurrences where it is made explicit that ‘we’ refers to Karelians:

- (3) *Kaikin myö hyvin maltamma, jotta vain nostamalla omua identiteettie (karjalaisien ičetuntuo) myö voima pisyö karjalaisina.* (VK1)  
 ‘We all understand well that we can remain Karelians only by strengthening our own identity (the self-respect of Karelians).’

It must be noted, however, that the reference to ‘we’ is sometimes ambiguous, and there are also occasions where it refers to all citizens of Russia.

The counterpart of Us is Them; it is encountered much more seldom in the texts, and it is often not made clear who They actually are, although the data does contain some instances where the counterpart of Karelians is explicitly identified as Russians. This impreciseness of They is a characteristic observed in other studies on national identity construction as well (Wodak et al. 2009: 141).

The use of ‘we’ is not as common in the Russian papers as it is in the Karelian papers. The motivation for this may include the less explicit techniques of group construction or difference in genre: a minority newspaper may be regarded as a subcategory of newspaper journalism, using a different stylistic repertoire. The use of ‘we’ as constructing group identity is limited to quotes. For instance, a kindergarten principal of Finnish origin is quoted as saying:

- (4) *Teper ’my – ravnye na svoej zemle* (KK1)  
 ‘Now we are equal in our land.’

Politicians were also quoted as using ‘we’ when referring to citizens of Russia.

There is no genuine conflict between minority and majority in the texts, but rather between minority and authorities, who do not really care for the Karelians. The absence of a clear juxtaposition between Karelians and Russians could be considered a sign of multiple identities and perhaps also the narrowness of the Karelian identity, which alone is not sufficient for the needs of modern life. A strong division between Us and Them cannot be made on the Karelian–Russian axis.

The Russian papers show the same picture: most of the texts further good ethnic relations between Finno-Ugric and non-Finno-Ugric nations, often through quotes from local political speeches. This may echo the rhetoric of the Soviet nation and the friendship of peoples. The injustices of the past are not a taboo, however: the data contained some references to historical conflicts in the region, especially the repressions of Stalin. It seems that these topics are allowed in the papers, but they require a journalist’s personal interest to bring them up. It is also a sign that there has been a need for some people to address these topics and close the gap from the Soviet period, when not all views and opinions could be voiced; even after the Soviet era, the discussion around these topics has been scanty (5).

- (5) *Kyläraunivot ta vanhan kalmismuan jiännökset voijah kertuo äijän. Oppikirjoissa istorijua voit muutella vaikka sata kertua ta kaikki se, mi ei passua tapahtumien viralliseh versijoh, voit piilottua arkistoh. Ka vanhat pogostat kerrotah tiijonhimosella elämästä kaunistelomatta. (VK2)*

‘Village ruins and remnants of old cemeteries can tell a lot. In school books, you can change the history a hundred times and hide in archives everything that does not fit the official version of what happened. But old pogosts will unfold life without palliation for those who are interested.’

## 9. Representations of the Karelian language

The Karelian papers reflect an affectionate attitude to the Karelian language. Apart from *karjalan kieli* ‘Karelian language’, it is often referred to as *oma kieli* ‘own language’ or *muamankieli* ‘mother tongue’. However, the concept of *muamankieli* does not necessarily mean the language one has learnt first or at home; neither does it

mean the language that one has the most competence in. For example, the fact that school children are sometimes reported as learning their *muamankieli* from scratch sheds more light on the meaning of the term. *Muamankieli* is a heritage language, but it is considered a means of transmitting feelings and deeper thoughts (6).

- (6) *Sehäi on tozi, gu vaiku omal muamankielel voibi kuvata toizile kai parahat, südames olijat tunnot.* (OM2)

‘It is a fact that the best feelings of the heart can only be shared with others in one’s own mother tongue.’

This affection is sometimes stressed with the pronoun *oma* ‘own’. It is presented as a factor that creates solidarity, bringing people together.

To the readers of *Kur’er Karelii* and *Karel’skaja Gubernija*, the Karelian language appears just as a part of the Karelian tradition and not as having much value per se. It is presented as being in need of some kind of undefined support. Reading between the lines, it becomes clear that the language is not used in everyday life, but strong opinions on the present situation or the future prospects of the language are not voiced. The ethnic diversity of Karelia is brought up quite often, but societal multilingualism is not. If addressed at all, it is represented as a symbol of the friendly relations and equality of the peoples. Multilingualism in families is not a common topic and it is not even once mentioned in connection with Finno-Ugric peoples. Criticism towards the authorities with regard to maintenance of language and culture is practically absent from the texts, and no one is explicitly blamed for the decline in the situation at the present moment, although problems of the past are dealt with regularly.

The Russian-language media analysed do not discuss phenomena of language maintenance, such as language nests. Neither do they discuss minority rights or the consequences of legislative changes for minorities. The Karelians are presented as actively participating in societal activities in their own organisations, an important object of which is the maintenance of the Karelian language. Coverage of their activities is limited: what is actually said at the meetings or what measures are taken are not commented upon. The question of language is more or less left to the Karelians.

In the Karelian papers, children are seen as the future of the Karelian language. Therefore, great importance is given to education, and implicitly also to politicians and state officials who decide on the sharing of resources.

- (7) *Voit uskuo, jotta tulijassa karjalaiset paissah, luvetah ta kirjutetah yhellä kielellä. Meijän pitäy kannattau opastajie, kut opassetah karjalan kieltä lapsille ta toivottua heillä onnea ja mänessytä.*  
(VK3)

‘You can believe that in the future the Karelians will speak, read and write in one language. We must support the teachers who teach the Karelian language to the children and wish them luck and success.’

It is an oft-repeated view that without language teaching at schools, the language will die out, but this statement is nearly always accompanied by remarks on support being insufficient. Although complaints about a lack of resources are frequent, it is not conflict-oriented. No one in particular is accused of the situation, but responsibility is given to officials and policy-makers in general, with no reference to nationality.

Vagueness is characteristic of all types of criticism in the Karelian papers. The use of passive constructions is frequent. People behind decisions are not often given a voice and they are not asked to explain their actions. For instance, complaints are made about insufficient broadcasting and the poor accessibility of electronic Karelian media. When broadcasting time has just diminished, the people behind the decision are not named. Karelians are not presented as having a significant role in decision-making. The unidentified establishment is accused of a lack of resources. Paradoxically, however, requests to do something for the language and national media are directed to the Karelians. The need for Karelians to take action is expressed explicitly in several articles, and the above-mentioned use of ‘we’ is most typical on such occasions.

In *Kur’er Karelii* and *Karel’skaja Gubernija*, minority languages are usually not presented as something that the majority should take responsibility for, although earlier negative experiences and the history of repression are presented as being responsible for the weak situation of the Finno-Ugric languages in the republic. The general opinion seems to be that times have changed and conditions have been created for the minority communities to take care of their own language. Sometimes the change is described in an almost over-enthusiastic way (8). The education of children is presented as producing fresh speakers of the language, even though it is evident in other articles of the same paper that children generally do not use Karelian in their everyday lives.

- (8) *Vpročem, na vremja i obstojatel'stva obižat'sja glupo. I svoju istinnuju rehabilitaciju Lilija Alekseevna vidit ne v kazennom kločke bumagi, vydannom organami, a v vospitanii plemjannicy Ul'jany, kotoraja, vozmožno, pervoj iz ètoj vetočki roda vnov' svobodno zagovorit po-karel'ski.* (SK2)

'However, it would be silly to be offended at the time and the circumstances. And Lilija Alekseevna sees the true rehabilitation not in the scrap of paper issued by state bodies, but in the education of her niece Ul'jana, who, probably as the first from her branch of family, again will start speaking Karelian freely.'

Interestingly, the only article in the data that actually addresses the assimilation process of the Karelians in more detail was published not in the Karelian papers but in *Kur'er Karelii*. The author describes the Karelian language as threatened and speaks of "mass assimilation" (9).

- (9) *Odnako massovaja assimiljacija karelov russkojazyčnym bol'sinstvom načalas' tol'ko v poslevoennye gody, kogda v respubliku na razvitie lesnoj i kamnedobyvajuščej promyšlennosti napravili bol'soe količestvo vylodcev iz vsech ugolkov strany.* (KK2)

'However, mass assimilation of Karelians by the Russian-speaking majority began only in the post-war years, when a lot of people from all corners of the country were directed to the republic for the development of wood and quarrying industries.'

The author accuses social phenomena such as industrialisation for the assimilation of the Karelians, but also claims that the members of the republican parliament have not supported pro-Karelian changes in legislation. He also describes the Karelian organisations' efforts to preserve the language and underlines that they do not wish any interethnic confrontation. The article is a realistic and quite detailed account of the present state of the Karelian language. However, articles with this theme are a rarity in the Russian local media.

## 10. Conclusions

Analysis reveals that the selected newspapers fill the typical roles of majority and minority media. Minority issues are not dealt with in the majority papers, although the Karelians are mentioned quite regularly



(and certainly more often than other minorities of the republic). Interestingly, similar states of affairs can also be found in very different contexts. For instance, the Sami minority of Finland, despite its engagement in minority activism, does not generally get a chance to speak up in the Finnish majority media. The Sami, however, are dealt with more often than other minorities and represented as the ‘home minority’ of Finland, a unique indigenous group with Finland as its patron (Pietikäinen 2000: 275). A similar representation of Karelians (and Finns and Veps) as the home minorities of the Republic of Karelia can be detected in the Russian newspapers.

The Karelian media fulfils only some of the functions of minority media. It concentrates on language planning and in creating common ethnic identity, but ignores the role of a forum for public ethnic representation, discussion and lobbying. The ‘other voice’ can be heard, but it is rather weak, restricted and aimed at only a certain readership with no noticeable aim at broadening its audience. Considering the pace of language shift among Karelian speakers, it is obvious that media published in Karelian is not accessible to all members of the minority, not to mention the majority. The minority media may reach the elderly, the language activists and perhaps students, but the young and middle-aged generations, including parents of young children who would form the target demographic of language maintenance efforts, are left aside. For this reason, they may have very little input from any media regarding minority issues.

The Russian newspapers tend to represent Karelians in terms of institutions rather than individuals, a journalistic habit that underlines the image of a homogeneous community. This is in line with the official representation of the Karelians in the republic as a “separate group with a common ethnic self-identification and self-designation” (Klementyev et al. 2012: 2). Such oversimplification ignores the actual problems of the Karelian community, such as the significant differences of the language varieties, the lack of a common standard language and the instability of a common ethnic identity. This image of ‘Karelianness’ as something stable and trouble-free masks the tensions inside the community (and possibly also between the minority and the majority). Pietikäinen (2003: 605) has made a similar observation on how the Sami are presented by a Finnish majority newspaper, noting that Finns are also represented as a homogeneous group. This sort of simplification may be characteristic of journalism, but it nevertheless diminishes the chances the minority has to make themselves heard.

All in all, the Karelian and Russian newspapers are surprisingly similar in their way of representing Karelians and the Karelian language. Common features of the texts on Karelians and the Karelian language in Russian and Karelian newspapers include a positive tone, but also a lack of depth in the articles. The Russian newspapers reflect the general situation in the republic, where officially the attitude of the majority towards Karelian and other Finnic languages is described as positive, although the presence of the Karelian language in the society is extremely limited.

The linguistic situation is left vague, and the texts contain no or very few proposals for action. Instead, both Russian and Karelian papers contain emotional depictions of village life and link the Karelian language with the maintenance of tradition. I would characterise the overall tone of the newspapers as ‘positive passiveness’. I connect this phenomenon with the “collective self-betrayal” mentioned by Klementyev et al. (2012: 5) and Pasanen (2006: 115). Many members of the Karelian community claim and want to believe that the language is actively being used in families, while studies show that this is not the case.

As regards the special needs of the Karelian language community, they certainly remain out of sight of the readers of the Russian newspapers (and also, at least partially, the readers of the Karelian papers). The Karelian language is presented as the Karelians’ own issue, despite reporting on language laws, etc. This practice does not support revitalisation efforts, when one of the essential problems is the poor visibility of Karelian in public debate and a low demand for the implementation of the rights defined by the legislation. The Karelian language seems to be left without a public voice almost as much by the minority language media as by the mainstream media. Pietikäinen (2000: 283) explains situations like this as originating from a distorted ideal of equality in news making that does not allow for the special needs of minorities.

“What better strategy could there be for ensuring minority survival than the development by minorities of their own media conveying their own point of view in their own language?” Riggins (1992: 3) poses this rhetorical question in his foreword on ethnic minority survival. In the case of Karelian, it seems that the minority point of view is quite close to the majority point of view, and therefore it does not challenge the image spread by the majority media that the Karelian language is, above all, for ethnic Karelians to preserve.

**Address:**

Outi Tánzos  
Finno-Ugrian Studies  
P.O. Box 24, 00014 University of Helsinki  
E-mail: outi.tanczos@helsinki.fi

**Abbreviations**

KK1 = “*Spasibo za uvaženie k rodnym jazykam*”. Nadežda Aki-mova. Kur’er Karelii 27.03.2004

KK2 = *Esli ne prinjat’ sročnyx mer, Karelija možet lišit’sja karelov*. Sergej Xorošavin. Kur’er Karelii 18.02.2004

OM1 = *Elä hätken, oma pajo*. Ol’ga Ogneva. Oma Mua 24.11.2010

OM2 = *Midä külvät muah, sidä leikkuat...*” Marina Viglijeva. Oma Mua 05.02.2004

SK1 = *O krae rodnom*. G. Luzganova. Severnyj Kur’er 27.02.1998

SK2 = *Žit’ rabotoj*. Andrej Žukov. Severnyj Kur’er 21.04.1998

VK1 = *Karjalaiset eletäh paremman toivossa*. Raisa Remsujeva and Omenaisen Olga. Vienan Karjala 11.03.2004

VK2 = *Mistä kuollut kylä kertou?* Andrei Tuomi. Vienan Karjala 26.02.2004

VK3 = *Entisijen aikojen muisselmie*. Impi Kieleväinen. Vienan Karjala 26.02.2004

**References**

- Alia, Valerie and Simone Bull (2005) *Media and ethnic minorities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Birin, Viktor (1991) “Karjalan ASNT:ssa asuvien karjalaisten demografinen tila 1950–1970-luvuilla”. *Carelia* 11, 146–153.
- Cormack, Mike (2004) “Developing minority language media studies”. *Mercator Media Forum* 7, 1, 3–12. Available online at <<http://www.aberystwyth.ac.uk/mercator/images/CormackText.pdf>>. Accessed on 02.08.2013.
- Cormack, Michael J. (2007) “The media and language maintenance”. In Michael J. Cormack and Niamh Hourigan, eds. *Minority language media: concepts, critiques and case studies*, 52–68. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cottle, Simon (2000) “Media research and ethnic minorities: mapping the field”. In Simon Cottle, ed. *Ethnic minorities and the media. Changing cultural boundaries*, 1–30. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Crystal, David (2000) *Language death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- van Dijk, Teun A. (1993) "Principles of critical discourse analysis". *Discourse & Society* 4, 2, 249–283.
- Fairclough, Norman (1995) *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Filippova, Jelena (2005) "Livvinkielinen Oma Mua". In Olga Haurinen and Helena Sulkala, eds. *Tutkielmia vähemmistökielistä Jäämereltä Liivinrantaan*, 93–94. (Vähemmistökielten tutkimus- ja koulutusverkoston raportti, 4.) Oulu: Oulun yliopisto. Suomen kielen, informaatiotutkimuksen ja logopedian laitos.
- Fishman, Joshua. A. (2001) "From theory to practice (and vice versa): review, reconsideration and reiteration". In Joshua A. Fishman, ed. *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift, revisited: a 21st century perspective*, 451–483. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Hall, Stuart (1997) "The spectacle of the 'other'". In Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*, 223–290. London: Sage.
- Integrum 2013 = *Website of the Integrum database*. Available online at <<http://www.integrumworld.com>>. Accessed on 27.07.2013.
- Karjalainen, Heini, Ulriikka Puura, Riho Grünthal, and Svetlana Kovaleva (2013) Karelian language in Russia. ELDIA case specific report. (Studies in European Language Diversity, 26.) Mainz: ELDIA.
- Klementyev, Yevgeniy, Svetlana Kovaleva, and Konstantin Zamyatin (2012) *The Karelian language in Russia: An overview of a language in context*. (Working Papers in European Language Diversity, 12.) Helsinki: ELDIA. Available online at <<http://www.eldia-project.org/index.php/news-events-ac/seld-wpeld>>. Accessed on 24.09.2013.
- Kur'er Karelii 2011 = *Website of Kur'er Karelii*. Available online at <<http://www.kurier.karelia.ru>>. Accessed on 20.02.2011.
- Lallukka, Seppo (2001) "Finno-Ugrians of Russia: vanishing cultural communities?". *Nationalities Papers* 29, 1, 9–39.
- Lallukka, Seppo (2012) "Kansojen väkilukujen kehityspiirteitä". In: Ildikó Lehtinen, ed. *Volgan mutkasta Siperiaan*, 178–189. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Oma Mua 2013 = *Viena da liygi: erikseh vai yhteh. Oma Mua* 30. Available online at <[http://omamua.rkperiodika.ru/issues/noumeru\\_30/viena\\_da\\_liygi\\_erikseh\\_vai\\_yhteh/?p=1](http://omamua.rkperiodika.ru/issues/noumeru_30/viena_da_liygi_erikseh_vai_yhteh/?p=1)>. Accessed on 15.12.2013.
- Pasanen, Annika (2006) "Karjalan kielen nykytila ja tulevaisuus". *Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Aikakauskirja* 91, 115–131.
- Perepis' 2010 = *Website of the Russian census of 2010*. Russian Federation Federal State Statistics Service. Available online at <[http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis\\_itogi1612.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm)>. Accessed on 14.01.2014.
- Pietikäinen, Sari (2000) *Discourses of differentiation: ethnic representations in newspaper texts*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.
- Pietikäinen, Sari (2003) "Indigenous identity in print". *Discourse & Society* 14, 5, 581–609.
- Pietiläinen, Jukka (2002) *The regional newspaper in post-Soviet Russia: society, press and journalism in the Republic of Karelia 1985-2001*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

- Pietiläinen, Jukka (2005) "Media in the life of Russians". In Harri Melin, ed. *Social structure, public space and civil society in Karelia*, 99–116. Helsinki: Kikimora Publications.
- Riggins, Stephen Harold (1992) "The media imperative: ethnic minority survival in the age of mass communication". In Stephen Harold Riggins, ed. *Ethnic minority media. An international perspective*, 1–20. Newbury Park, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Sarhimaa, Anneli (1996) "Language planning and sociolinguistic trends in (Soviet) Karelia 1917–1994". In Tina Hickey and Jenny Williams, eds. *Language, education and society in a changing world*, 73–85. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Sarhimaa, Anneli (1999) *Syntactic transfer, contact-induced change, and the evolution of bilingual mixed codes*. (Studia Fennica. Linguistica, 9.) Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.
- Skön, Kirsi and Sinikka Torkkola (1997) "Täällä Petroskoi": omakielisten radio- ja televisio-ohjelmien merkitys Venäjän Karjalan kansalliselle vähemmistölle. (Karjalan tutkimuslaitoksen monisteita, 2.) Joensuu: Joensuun yliopisto.
- Tsygankov, Anatoli (2004) "Sananvapauden rajat Venäjän Karjalassa". *Idäntutkimus* 4, 3–8.
- Wodak, Ruth, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart (2009) *The discursive construction of national identity*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

**Kokkuvõte. Outi Tónczos: Karjalased ja karjala keel kohalikes karjala ja vene ajalehtedes.** Artiklis esitletakse kriitilise diskursusanalüüsi tulemusi, mis saadi kahe karjalakeelse ning kahe venekeelse Karjala Vabariigis ilmuva kohaliku ajalehe uurimisel. Vähemuskeelset meediat peetakse tihti tähtsaks tööriistaks vähemuskeelte säilitamisel. Artikkel keskendub karjala keele ja kultuuri käsitletele nii vähemuse kui ka peavoolu ajalehtedes ning sellele, millist mõju need võivad avaldada karjala keele säilitamisele ja kasutamise elavdamisele.

**Märksõnad:** karjala keel, vähemuskeel, kriitiline diskursusanalüüs, karjala-keelsed ajalehed, vähemusmeedia, keelte elustamine